

ADVENT 4

19th December 2021

HillSide's Minister – Rev' Allan Booth

Blurb:

*Advent reminds us that we can never be too old too young, too anything for God to use us.
But we do need to decide to be willing participants... that makes all the difference in the world!*

Micah 5: 2-5a NIV

²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans^[a] of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

³Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

⁵And he will be our peace
when the Assyrians invade our land
and march through our fortresses.

We will raise against them seven shepherds,
even eight commanders,

Luke 1:39-55 NIV

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Mary's Song

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors."

Sermon

The lesson for us began last week, did you spend some time thinking about what other ways God could have used to save the world? The truth is the lesson continues throughout our lives.

You'll remember that last week we spoke about how advent shifts our focus, from grand to intimate, from external to internal. How one must stop low to enter the stable and worship at the manger. Today we pick up how God uses the things we call small and insignificant to achieve his salvation plan. This is evident in the choice of Bethlehem a tiny village, south of Jerusalem, as the place where the Saviour is born. And enhanced in the meeting of the two moms, the cousins Elizabeth and Mary, even by the movement in Elizabeth's womb.

The thing that we often slip passed is that Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary chose to be willing participants. Zechariah argued with the angel, claiming that both he and Elizabeth were too old, yet Elizabeth was accepting. In the readings of the 9 lessons and carols we read of Mary's reluctant participation... moving from how can this be, I am a virgin, to let it be with me as God has planned. Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Mary had been a typical teenager and replied to the Angel "no don't think you can tell me what to do, who made you my boss?" the story would be quite different then.

As it is both moms were willing participants in the process of incarnation, God taking on flesh. This presents quite a challenge for us sitting here.... Do you see that we cannot be too old or too young; too innocent or too argumentative to not be useful in God's plan? We cannot standby, waiting for a superhero type to swoop in and save the day, this is not the Marvel or DC universe.

Followers of Jesus cannot be passive by-standers in this world; spectators of redemption.... We are called to be active participants in the salvation plan. Always re-imagining justice and mercy, always acting in love and grace even toward our enemies.

To get this right, is to be available to the prompting of the Spirit in every day small things. We can share a word of kindness instead of judgement. We repent where we have caused hurt, and perhaps closed the gate of the kingdom in someone's face. We consciously

become part of someone else's advent as they prepare for Jesus' presence in their own life. We can encourage one another to participate in God's call on our lives. As we work alongside others, we call everyday people away from destruction and toward salvation. This is so much more than handing over a tract and praying the sinner's prayer with them. What it is, is living each moment modelling a new way of life that recognises our interconnectedness and our interdependence; in other words our divine responsibility toward one another.

When we get this right and others see the fruit of the Spirit in our life, they too will be willing to join the transformative movement that is a relationship with Jesus.

We love large things, God; Grand entrances, Huge fanfares, Big events, Giant heroes and heroines

Yet somehow, size doesn't always translate into meaningful, transforming life.

And it seems, God, that you love small things; hidden wombs and timid teenagers, desert hermit preachers and tiny towns, obscure stables and unimportant people. It seems that in the small, your glory shines most brightly, And so we thank you, O God, and we praise you for small, life-changing, things.